

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SSM-03 IO-13 SSO-00 /086 W

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P R 221601Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2115

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8129

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, EG, PLO, XF

SUBJECT: THE RIYADH AGREEMENT AND THE 57TH CEASE-FIRE --

A PRELIMINARY VIEW FROM BEIRUT

REF: DAMASCUS 7222

1. AT 0600 ON THURSDAY, OCT 21, THE TIME THE CEASE-FIRE WAS TO BEGIN, A SHARP RAINSTORM HIT BEIRUT AND LASTED MOST OF THE MORNING. THE WEATHER MAY HAVE HAD A DAMPENING EFFECT ON THE ARTILLERYMEN ON BOTH SIDES WHO SEEMED TO BE USING UP AS MUCH OF THEIR AMMUNITION AS POSSIBLE DURING PREVIOUS NIGHT.

2. THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE CEASE-FIRE, UNTIL THE ARRIVAL OF THE NEW ARAB LEAGUE PEACE-KEEPING FORCES,
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WILL BE CRUCIAL PERIOD; SARKIS, ARAFAT AND THE SAUDI

MILITARY ATTACHE, GENERAL ALI AL-SHA'IR, ARE WORKING HARD TO SET UP OBSERVATION POSTS, BUT UNTIL NEW TROOPS ARRIVE THEY WILL HAVE TO RELY ON JAWBONING RATHER THAN FORCE TO ASSURE COMPLIANCE. THE MORNING OF OCT 22 WAS QUIETER THAN MORNING OF OCT 21, AND MOST GROUPS HAVE PLEDGED COOPERATION. BEIRUTIS REMEMBER, HOWEVER, THE MANY PREVIOUS CEASE-FIRES THAT HAVE STARTED IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF HOPE AND THEN COLLAPSED BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ONE TO PUNISH THE VIOLATORS. THE SYRIAN FORCES PRESENTLY IN LEBANON MAY BE ABLE TO KEEP THE PEACE IN THE NORTH AROUND TRIPOLI, IN THE ALEY AREA, AND IN SIDON, BUT AN INDEPENDENT GROUP THAT HAS NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN THE FIGHTING WILL BE NEEDED TO ASSURE EVEN A TEMPORARY PEACE ON THE CONFRONTATION LINE IN BEIRUT.

3. THE ONE AREA WHERE THE CEASE-FIRE IS BEING COMPLETELY IGNORED IS THE SOUTH, WHERE CHRISTIAN/SHIITE FORCES, ACTIVELY ASSISTED BY ISRAELI, ARE MOVING QUICKLY TO ESTABLISH CONTROL OVER ALL OF LEBANON SOUTH OF THE LITANI. MOST OF THE BORDER VILLAGES ARE ALREADY IN THEIR HANDS, AND THE LAST PALESTINIAN STRONGHOLD IN THE AREA, BINT JBAYL, IS REPORTEDLY UNDER ATTACK AT THIS WRITING. THE CHRISTIAN/SHIITE/ISRAELI CAMPAIGN IS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE THE FEDAYEEN PRESENCE IN THIS AREA BEFORE ANY ARAB LEAGUE PEACE-KEEPING FORCES CAN ARRIVE. IF IT SUCCEEDS, THE PORTION OF THE CAIRO ACCORDS THAT ISRAEL FINDS MOST OBJECTIONABLE AND THAT CAUSED SUCH DESTRUCTION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON WILL HAVE BECOME A DEAD LETTER.

4. OCT 23 MARKS THE END OF PRESIDENT SARKIS'S FIRST MONTH IN OFFICE. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE LAST TWO WEEKS AND HIS FIRST TWO WEEKS AS PRESIDENT IS STARTLING. ON SEPT 28, ONLY FIVE DAYS AFTER HE ASSUMED OFFICE, THE SYRIANS LAUNCHED THEIR CAMPAIGN TO CLEAR THE HIGH MATN, APPARENTLY WITHOUT EVEN INFORMING HIM. UNTIL OCTOBER 9, HE WAS ALMOST THE FORGOTTEN MAN IN HIS PALACE IN BAABDA, SAYING NOTHING AND BEING VISITED ONLY BY SECOND-LEVEL LEBANESE

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POLITICIANS AND TECHNOCRATS. HIS EFFORTS AT PEACEMAKING DURING THE SHTURA CONFERENCE FROM OCT 9 TO 11 WERE RUDELY INTERRUPTED BY THE SYRIAN DRIVE TOWARDS ALEY AND SIDON. YET DURING THIS PERIOD HE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN DOING HIS HOMEWORK AND DEVELOPING HIS RELATIONS WITH THE PALESTINIANS. WHEN THE RIYADH MEETING WAS SUDDENLY ARRANGED, HE WAS READY AND BY ALL ACCOUNTS ACQUITTED HIMSELF WELL. THE WORKING PAPER

THAT HE AND ARAFAT PRESENTED AT SHTURA WAS REPORTEDLY VERY SIMILAR TO THE AGREEMENT REACHED IN RIYADH. AS THE COMMANDER OF THE ARAB LEAGUE PEACEKEEPING FORCE HE NOW HAS, IN THEORY AT LEAST, THE AUTHORITY AND POWER THAT HE NEEDS TO MAKE PEACE IN LEBANON. THE QUESTION REMAINS, HOWEVER, WHETHER HE CAN KEEP THE CEASE-FIRE IN EFFECT UNTIL THE NEW ARAB LEAGUE FORCE IS FORMALLY CONSTITUTED AND IN PLACE, AND WHETHER HE HAS THE WILL TO USE THEM AGAINST CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IF NECESSARY.

5. SARKIS APPEARS TO BE THE ONE CLEAR WINNER ON THE LEBANESE SCENE FROM THE RIYADH AGREEMENT. KAMAL JUNBLATT, BECAUSE OF HIS ABSENCE FROM LEBANON DURING THE PAST CRUCIAL WEEKS, THE GROWING SPLIT IN THE DRUZE COMMUNITY, AND BECAUSE THE AGREEMENT SEPARATES HIM FROM HIS PALESTINIAN ALLIES, HAS LOST INFLUENCE. JUNBLATT HAS PUBLICLY ACCEPTED THE RIYADH AGREEMENT ON THE "ASSUMPTION" THAT IT MEANS WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN TROOPS, BUT HE MUST KNOW THAT THIS IS AN ILLUSION. ONE LEADING BEIRUT SUNNI POLITICIAN SAID ON OCT 21, "THE BEST THING JUNBLATT CAN DO NOW IS TO TAKE A TRIP TO INDIA." THE RIGHTIST CHRISTIANS HAVE GRUDGINGLY ACCEPTED SARKIS' STATEMENT THAT HE GOT THE BEST DEAL HE COULD BUT THEY ARE NOT CONVINCED AND HAVE BASICALLY ADOPTED A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE. CAMILLE CHAMOUN IS 76 YEARS OLD AND THERE ARE REPORTS THAT HE IS NOT ALWAYS FULLY RATIONAL. HE IS QUITE CAPABLE OF UPSETTING THE APPLE CART IF THE AGREEMENT IS NOT IMPLEMENTED AS HE THINKS IT SHOULD BE.

6. FORMER PRIME MINISTERS RASHID KARAMI AND SAEB SALAM, WHILE PRAISING RIYADH AGREEMENT, HAVE COMPLAINED THAT IT PLACES ALL AUTHORITY WITH THE PRESIDENT (A MARONITE)
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AND NONE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER (NORMALLY A SUNNI). THEY AND OTHER LEADING SUNNI POLITICIANS ARE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE ON THIS POINT BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S POWER PLAY, JUST BEFORE LEAVING OFFICE, IN APPOINTING CHAMOUN AS "ACTING PRIME MINISTER." IN FACT, THIS COMPLAINT IS PRIMARILY FOR THE RECORD; THE SUNNIS POLITICIANS ARE PROBABLY DELIGHTED TO SEE SARKIS AND ARAFAT ASSUME THE DIFFICULT RESPONSIBILITY OF CONTROLLING THE REJECTIONISTS ON BOTH SIDES.
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